

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

A COLD March wind was chilling London through and through. It was blowing straight from the north-east, and it had driven up heavy masses of lead-coloured cloud which drifted slowly and broodingly across the sky. All colour seemed to have been shrivelled out of the world. Streets and houses seemed to have taken on a monotone of neutral tint which was inexpressibly depressing. Smartly dressed women were shut up in broughams; and the mass of working womanhood, whose care-laden steps cover the length and breadth of London from morning until night, was in its dreariest bad weather garb. Every now and then sharp storms of bitter rain broke; adding yet another element of chill discomfort in the mud and slush which they created.

Even a large hospital, with its inevitable monotony, is hardly proof against such atmospheric conditions; and about a certain great building in the east of London there hung an all-pervading gloom. The colour-washed corridor and the stone staircases, with their faint, penetrating odour of disinfectants and anæsthetics, looked cheerless and dark, although it was only four o'clock in the afternoon; and the few footsteps that passed to and fro echoed desolately enough in the quiet.

Passing up the first flight of one of the staircases were two men—one of the hospital porters and Bryan Armitage. They went on in silence up another flight of stairs and along a narrow corridor, and then the

porter stopped and threw open a door. The room thus revealed was a cross between a doctor's consulting room and a private study.

"If you will walk in here, sir," said the man, addressing Bryan deferentially, "Dr. Branston will be at liberty before long. You will find the day's papers on the table, sir!"

"Thanks!" returned Bryan, pleasantly. "I am a little before my time, I'm afraid."

"No, sir, I believe not. The rounds take a little longer some days than others. The doctor is going through the wards, sir."

The man stirred the fire; an attention which, since the guest was unknown to him, was obviously due to the host's position in the hospital; and turning a chair invitingly towards it, withdrew.

Bryan, however, did not take possession of the seat thus tacitly suggested to him. He walked up to the fireplace, and took up a standing position on the hearthrug facing the room. He had grown considerably older-looking in the time which had elapsed since he went abroad; and the lines into which his face was settling were very good ones. They were very attractive also; partly, as of old, by reason of the honest kindness which they seemed to radiate, and partly by reason of a certain steady wistfulness which seemed to underlie the quick and ready sense of humour with which every feature was instinct. His figure had grown broader and less boyish in outline, and his whole manner and appearance had lost that nameless disadvantage which is only to be defined as provincialism.

In spite of that same self-possession, however, it was obvious as he stood there waiting that he was distinctly nervous. His eyes wandered restlessly over his surroundings, and he was a trifle pale.

Bryan had returned to England only a few days before, after an absence of ten months. He had heard through an Alchester correspondent of the tragedy that had shattered Dr. Vallotton's household, and he had written to North at the time—a few lines of feeling too deep to be anything but incoherent in its expression. North had been Bryan Armitage's hero all his life. What unsuspected delicacy of perception had attracted him as a boy towards his unresponsive and unpopular senior it is not possible to say; but the attraction had never faded. As boy and as man, he had given to North Branston that admiring affection which asks for no encouragement; which overlooks—or perhaps in all unconsciousness sees through—the defects which mark its object out for universal condemnation. He had seen North last free from those trammels of which he had been vaguely conscious as Alchester's creation; with success in his hand, with the ball of life at his feet. The change in North which he had then detected was utterly forgotten by him now. The hard, contemptuous patronage which had replaced the careless friendliness with which he himself had always been treated, had faded into the background of his memory. He realised only the gulf which lay between what had been and what was. Tender of feeling, vivid—where his sympathies were concerned—in imagination he was dominated by that poignancy of realisation always engendered by a first meeting with one who comes from out the fire of great suffering. As he stood there in North's room, waiting for its owner, his agitation annihilated the six months that had passed since the blow had fallen, and its horror returned upon him in all its first intensity.

He had been waiting perhaps a quarter of an hour when a step which he recognised sounded along the passage, and North Branston came into the room. He came quickly forward as his visitor advanced to meet him.

"I am afraid you have had to wait, Bryan, boy," he said. "How are you?"

There was no verbal answer. Resolute as he was to add nothing by his agitation to the inevitable pain of the meeting, in that first moment Bryan Armitage found speech beyond him. He could only wring the hand held out to him as though he would never let it go. A slight grave smile just touched North's lips, and then, as though to give the younger man time to

recover himself, he turned away and drew up another chair to the fire, speaking rather lengthily as he did so of the route by which Bryan had come to the hospital, and the length of time it had taken.

Nearly six months had gone by since that chasm which divided past from present had opened in North Branston's life, and those six months had brought to his external personality a change which was not the less striking in that it was very difficult to trace it to its source. Such casual acquaintances as he encountered in these days told one another that "Branston was amazingly aged," basing their criticism upon the fact that the hair about his temples had grown very grey, and upon the worn lines visible about his eyes; but time alone could not have produced the difference which was thus sweepingly characterised. The dark irregular features, a little haggard as though with ceaseless strain, remained practically unaltered; but the expression that informed them was that of a different man. The composure which had fallen on it with the shattering of his life rested on it still, and beneath it all the cynicism, the bitterness, the hardness which had constituted the meaning of his face hitherto had subsided. But that composure itself had changed its character. It was the deliberate and determined self-control of a man whose daily life is a life of endurance. His very voice told the same story. It was the voice of a man the first of whose daily obligations is the obligation of patience.

Some influence from North's manner seemed to touch and still Bryan Armitage's nervousness. He answered North in a low voice and briefly, but coherently, and it was he who broke the moment's pause that followed as they sat down.

"It is very good of you to let me come, North," he said.

North's smile was a singularly fleeting expression, but it gave something to his face of which he was utterly unconscious. He smiled now.

"I am very glad to see you," he said. "Tell me your news."

Never in all the years of their acquaintance had similar words been addressed to Bryan Armitage by his elder, in the tone of unconscious sympathy and interest in which they were uttered now, and a flush of vague pleasure mounted to the young man's face. He recounted with frank and involuntary eagerness such details of his doings during the past months as suggested themselves to his modest mind as interesting; drawn on

by pleasant comments and questions from his hearer; and he stopped at last rather abruptly, self-convicted of having talked exclusively of his own affairs.

There was a pause, which North, perhaps understanding on what topic the younger man must perforce wish to touch, forbore to break.

Then Bryan Armitage leaned suddenly forward, looking straight into the fire, and began to speak in a low, jerking tone.

"I wrote to you here, North," he said, "because I didn't know your address. Where do you live?"

The words in which North Branstons answered were brief and matter of fact, but there was nothing forbidding about their tone; and the younger man, still with his eyes averted, went on.

"I heard," he said, with a difficult note of interrogation in his voice, "that you were living with—with——"

He faltered and left his sentence unfinished.

North finished it for him.

"My mother is with me," he said.

The words were spoken perfectly steadily. There was nothing strange or unfamiliar in them to the speaker now. The very deliberation with which they were uttered was intended merely to accustom Bryan Armitage to what was still so new and painful to him. But to the young man's face they brought the colour in a hot rush.

"Yes," he said hurriedly. "I—I understood so!" He paused, and then he said in a tone which was hardly audible: "How is—Mrs. Vallotson?"

A slight, unconscious shade crossed North's face. There was a touch of constraint in his voice as he said:

"She is fairly well, I think."

"Is she—does she—might I call?"

The shade had died away from North's face as he turned to the speaker. But he shook his head.

"No, Bryan," he said gently, and rather sadly. "I wish you might! But it would be of no use, thank you. She sees nobody!"

With an uncertain gesture of acquiescence, Bryan looked back again into the fire, and there was an eloquent silence.

"Can you tell me—do you mind my asking—how they are getting on at Alnchester?"

The words had broken from Bryan, uneven and a little hoarse in tone; North, hearing them, seemed to rouse himself from the abstraction into which he had fallen.

"They are abroad," he said. "I hear of

them only through Archdeacon French, but I hear often. They have been in the South of France for the last two months."

Bryan Armitage started painfully.

"Not for—for their health?" he exclaimed.

"No," returned North. "They are both quite well. They are coming home next month." He stopped and then added quietly: "Physical health is not the only thing that travel is good for."

"They have not left Alnchester for good?"

"No," said North again in a low voice.

"Dr. Vallotson decided otherwise."

"Would it have been better, do you think?"

North raised his hand and let it fall on the arm of his chair with a slow movement of uncertainty.

"He was the only possible judge," he said.

There was another silence. Bryan's fingers were working unconscious destruction, as he leaned forward and unceasingly twisted the handle of a table drawer near him.

"North," he said tentatively and not quite steadily. "Would you mind telling me how Constance took it? I'm a brute to ask you, but I haven't heard a word of her. I wrote to her—I couldn't help it—but she didn't answer! You see—you see——"

"Don't mind asking me," said North with grave kindness. "I cannot tell you much, I'm afraid. I wish I could, Bryan!"

"She has seen her mother since?"

"No!"

With a quick, startled movement Bryan lifted his bent head.

"No?" he repeated. "Why—was that Mrs. Vallotson's wish?"

"No," repeated North sternly, "it was her father's wish, but it was also Constance's own."

"Constance's own?" repeated Bryan incredulously. "Constance's? Why, I thought—I thought——"

"You were mistaken," was the grim response. "I was mistaken, too, though that is less surprising."

"But do you think it is right, North?"

There was a disturbed ring in Bryan's voice, and his face was full of perplexity and pain. North looked at him for a moment and then said:

"No, Bryan."

With a long breath, as though his ideas had received such a shock as necessitated their entire readjustment, the younger man sank back in his chair, gazing straight

before him. North watched him silently, and then realising better than did Bryan himself that the process of readjustment was not to be accomplished without time and pain, he broke up the pause with some words on an indifferent subject.

Bryan roused himself instantly, and made a valiant effort to respond to the lead thus given to the conversation. But in spite of himself his speech was not so ready nor his wits so quick as usual. It was not until he had risen to take leave that his preoccupation seemed to drop away from him, and leave him without a thought except for his host.

"You are settled in town for twelve months, then, at least?" said North.

"I think so," said Bryan. "Yes, I believe there's no doubt of it." He looked at North with his honest eyes full of feeling. "You'll let me see something of you, won't you?" he said. "May I—may I look you up in the evening, sometimes?"

North stretched out his hand warmly.

"We'll meet," he said, "but not at home, Bryan. No one comes to the house. Come here whenever you like."

The young man coloured scarlet; he felt that he had blundered, and had not made himself clear.

"Yes," he said confusedly. "I understand, of course, that—that I should see no one but you if I came to your place. But—if I came to see you? Do you see no one at home?"

"No one!" said North quietly.

Startled, he hardly knew why, and almost awestruck, Bryan Armitage wrung the hand held out to him, and went away.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was nearly an hour later when North Branston left the hospital. Twilight had fallen before its time, and, as evening drew on, the gusts of rain had settled into a steady downpour. North's way home was by the Underground Railway, and by the time he reached the station which was his destination it was quite dark. The wind was blowing with piercing sharpness round the corner of the street, as he paused for a moment on the wet pavement, but he hardly seemed to notice it. He opened his umbrella and turned up his trousers mechanically, and strode away through the rain.

Five minutes' brisk walking brought him to his road. From some of the houses bright lights streamed out, making twinkling reflections in the puddles, and on the fast

falling raindrops as they struck up from the pavement. But in the house at which North Branston stopped either the lights within were few, or they were very jealously enclosed by blinds and curtains, for only from the pane of glass over the door did any light come forth into the night. North went rapidly through the gate and up the steps. He let himself in with a latchkey, and closed the door behind him.

The hall in which he stood, with the staircase beyond, and the dining-room half visible through an open door, were those of a commonplace, comfortable house, furnished well, but after the most uninteresting fashion. The most conspicuous characteristic about it was the intense stillness that prevailed. A heavy silence brooded everywhere. There was a dead oppression about the atmosphere, a total absence of all life and movement, which gave to the house a curious effect of being shut off from the outside world.

No suggestion of being affected by his surroundings touched North's face or manner as he drew off his great-coat. He was accustomed to them. He hesitated a moment, and then he went slowly upstairs. He stopped. He opened a door on the first landing and paused.

The room was a drawing-room, and it was in semi-darkness. Dark curtains had been drawn across the windows, the fire had died low in the grate, and the only light came from a small reading-lamp. The green shaded flame seemed to cast rather shadow than radiance, and in the sombre quiet which reigned here yet more intensely than it did elsewhere, the appearance of the room was indescribably gloomy. Lying on the sofa at the end of the room farthest from the door was Mrs. Vallotson.

She did not stir as the door opened. The lamp was close beside her, its rays fell full on her face, and North saw as he stood on the threshold, that she was asleep. The grave preoccupation of his face seemed to flash as though his thoughts had suddenly and unexpectedly been met half-way. He closed the door noiselessly, crossed the room with quick, quiet steps, and stood looking down at her intently.

Set and sullen, even in unconsciousness, with bitter compressed lines about the mouth, with that indefinable coarseness pervading every line, with stubborn rebellion stamped on every feature, the face that lay there in the light of the lamp was the face of the desperate woman who had

confronted North Branston six months ago, hardened by every long day that had come and gone since then. No touch of perceptiveness, no touch of remorse, no touch of gentleness had fallen on those strong, harsh lines. But it was not with mental characteristics written or on her face that the eyes that watched her now were busy. A great and striking physical change had come upon Mrs. Vallotson during those same six months. The powerfully made figure, once so firm and matronly, had grown gaunt; even the hands, curiously rigid in her sleep, had an appearance of being all bone. Her face was sunken, and there was a pinched look about it which made her look twenty years older than her real age. Her colour was quite gone, and there was a singular grey look even about her lips.

She was sleeping very heavily—strangely heavily considering the light upon her face, considering also the close scrutiny which she was undergoing. The position was not the easy position most natural in sleep, there was something stiff and constrained about it, as though it had been adopted deliberately as affording some sort of unusual relief. And about her face there was a suggestion of physical exhaustion, such as might be produced by long-continued sleeplessness, or ceaseless pain.

North studied her face, glanced keenly at her position, and then stooped cautiously and listened to her breathing. At last he turned away, and went quietly out of the room, leaving her still sleeping.

An hour later the sound of the gong echoed through the quiet house, and North came into the drawing-room again. It was lighted up this time, but the cheerlessness of its appearance seemed to be rather accentuated than dissipated. It was empty when he entered; but a moment later there was a slow step on the stairs, and Mrs. Vallotson appeared.

Hard as her face had been in sleep, the contrast—now that she was awake—between its total immobility and the sombre fire that brooded in her sunken eyes, gave it the appearance of a mask cut in stone. No colour had come to her, and her lips were compressed. She wore a morning dress of heavy serge.

She made no answer, as North, coming towards her, wished her a quiet good evening; and he waited, as though her silence were a matter of course, while she preceded him out of the room and down to the dining-room.

Every morning and every evening did the mother and son sit facing one another on either side of the table; and as was the intercourse that now ensued, so was the intercourse between them from day to day. North talked, not plentifully, but with a grave, courteous perseverance which would not recognise the silence which met it. His manner to his mother was gentle and considerate; and both these qualities were rendered the more striking by the restraint which held back even his care for her from forcing itself upon her notice. He spoke entirely of impersonal matters; of such news as was to be found in the evening paper; of the weather, and so forth. He did not mention Bryan Armitage. He asked her no question of any kind.

Such replies as were absolutely necessary, if his speech was to have even the semblance of conversation, came from Mrs. Vallotson, monosyllabic, and indifferent. Her voice had acquired the peculiarly monotonous tone of a person who seldom speaks. She never originated a remark; she never looked at him. She sat for the most part with her eyes fixed steadily on her plate. The woman with whom household management had been a passion took not the faintest notice now either of the servants or of the dinner provided. The meal being over and dessert placed upon the table, she rose, and passed out of the room as silently as she had entered it.

North, having risen to open the door for her, did not return to his seat when he was alone. He walked up to the fireplace and stood there gazing down into the hot coals, reflecting, as it seemed, anxiously and uncertainly.

The subject of his cogitations was one which had been the background of all his thoughts for many days, and those few minutes during which he had watched his mother's sleep had brought it to a crisis. He moved abruptly at last, and went upstairs.

Mrs. Vallotson was sitting on a stiff, uncomfortable chair near the lamp. She had some needlework in her hand; needlework which, though North's masculine eyes were unaware of the fact, never advanced; and she did not lift her eyes as he entered the room. He sat down near her; but he did not, as he was wont to do, take up the paper which lay near his hand. As though he desired to arrest her attention, he fixed his eyes on her face with a deliberate directness of gaze which he usually avoided with her. Mrs. Vallotson's eyes, however, were fastened to her work, and her fingers

went on moving slowly and mechanically. And after a moment North spoke.

"Mother," he said, "do you not think it would be well for you to see a doctor?"

It was on very rare occasions only that he addressed her by the title which it was his right to give her. On his first word Mrs. Vallotson started and lifted her head, facing him with a fierce defiance and repulsion struggling with the rigidity of her expression. He spoke slowly, like a man who has weighed his words well, and as he finished a slight shock passed across her face. She looked at him for a moment in silence.

"No," she said sullenly. "Why should I?"

"Because you are not well," he said quietly.

A painful, half furtive consciousness, suppressed and thrust down, rose in her eyes; and her voice, as she answered, grated harshly.

"I don't know what you mean."

"I think you do," he said steadily. He was keenly observant of her. "You are in pain at this moment; you are in constant pain. I do not propose that you should let me treat you. But I should like you to see a friend of mine." He paused a moment, and then added very gravely and gently: "I should not suggest it if I did not think it—necessary."

She did not speak at once. The grey hue about her mouth deepened by a shade, and gradually there grew about her face something which gave it a singular coarse dignity. She took up her work again mechanically.

"Very well," she said.

"Will you see him to-morrow?"

"When you please."

"At what time?"

"I am always at home."

THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD.

WHERE is it? "At Charing Cross, of course," says the self-assured Londoner, and in one sense he may not be far wrong. "At Boston," says the cultured inhabitant of the "hub" of the universe. "Wherever I am," says the autocrat who essays to sway the destinies of nations. Well, we all know the story of the Head of the Table, and even if we did not know it, instinct would tell us where to look. But the centre of the world, in an actual, physical, racial, and mundanely-comprehen-

sive sense—where is it? We cannot answer the question so easily as did good old Herodotus, who scouted as absurd the idea of the earth being circular. "For my own part," says the Father of History—and of lies, according to some people—"I cannot but think it exceedingly ridiculous to hear some men talk of the circumference of the Earth, pretending without the smallest reason or probability that the ocean encompasses the Earth, that the Earth is round as if mechanically formed so, and that Asia is equal to Europe." He found no difficulty in describing the figure and size of such of the portions of the earth whose existence he recognised, but then he said "from India eastward the whole Earth is one vast desert, unknown and unexplored." And for long after Herodotus, the Mediterranean was regarded as the central sea of the world, and, in the time of Herodotus, Rhodes was accounted the centre of that centre.

It is very interesting, however, to trace how many centres the world has had within the range of written history. The old Egyptians placed it at Thebes, the Assyrians at Babylon, the Hindus at Mount Meru, the Jews at Jerusalem, and the Greeks at Olympus, until they moved it to Rhodes. There exists an old map in which the world is given a human figure, and the heart of that figure is Egypt. And there exists, or did exist, an old fountain in Sicily on which was this inscription: "I am in the centre of the garden; this garden is the centre of Sicily; and Sicily is the Centre of the whole Earth."

In that vast desert eastward of India, imagined by Herodotus, there is the country of China, which calls itself the Middle Kingdom, and the Emperor of which, in a letter to the King of England in this very century, announced that China is endowed by Heaven as the "flourishing and central Empire" of the world. And yet, once upon a time, according to some old Japanese writings, Japan was known as the Middle Kingdom; and the Persians claimed the same position for Persia; and, according to Professor Sayce, the old Chaldeans said that the centre of the earth was in the heart of the impenetrable forest of Eridu.

This forest, by the way, was also called the "holy house of the Gods," but it does not seem to have had anything to do with the Terrestrial Paradise, the exact location of which Mr. Baring-Gould has laboriously tried to identify through the legends of the nations. It is a curious fact that a ninth-

century map, in the Strasburg Library, places the Terrestrial Paradise—the Garden of Eden—in that part of Asia we now know as the Chinese Empire, and it is also so marked in a map found by Mr. Baring-Gould in the British Museum.

There is a twelfth-century map of the world at Cambridge, which shows Paradise on an island opposite the mouth of the Ganges. And in the story of Saint Brandan, the Saint reaches an island, somewhere "due east from Ireland," which was Paradise, and on which he met with a man who told him that a stream—which no living being might cross—flowing through the island, divided the world in twain. Another centre!

In an Icelandic story of the fourteenth century are related the marvellous adventures of one Eirek of Drontheim, who, determined to find out the Deathless Land, made his way to Constantinople. There he received a lesson in geography from the Emperor. The world, he was told, was precisely one hundred and eighty thousand stages, or about one million English miles, round, and is not propped up on posts, but is supported by the will of God. The distance between the Earth and Heaven, he was told, is one hundred thousand and forty-five miles, and round about the Earth is a big sea called the Ocean. "But what is to the south of the Earth?" asked the inquisitive Eirek. "Oh," replied the Emperor, "the end of the Earth is there, and it is called India." "And where shall I find the Deathless Land?" he enquired, and he was told that slightly to the east of India lies Paradise. Thereupon Eirek and a companion started across Syria, took ship and arrived at India, through which they journeyed on horseback till they came to a strait which separated them from a beautiful land. Eirek crossed over and found himself in Paradise, and, strange to say, an excellent cold luncheon waiting for him. It took him seven years to get home again, and, as he died soon after his return, the map of the route was lost.

Sir John Mandeville's description of the Terrestrial Paradise which he discovered, gives it as the highest place on the earth—so high that the waters of the Flood could not reach it. And in the very centre of the highest point is a well, he said, that casts out the four streams, Ganges, Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates, all sacred streams. Now in the "Encyclopædia of India" we learn that "The Hindus at Bikanir Rajputana

taught that the mountain Meru is in the centre surrounded by concentric circles of land and sea. Some Hindus regard Mount Meru as the North Pole. The astronomical views of the Puranas make the heavenly bodies turn round it." So here again we have a mountain as the terrestrial centre.

In the Avesta there is reference to a lofty mountain at the centre of the world from which all the mountains of the earth have grown, and the summit of which is the fountain of waters, whereby grow the two trees—the Heavenly Soma, and another which yields all the seeds that germinate on earth. From this fountain, according to the Buddhist tradition, flow four streams to the four points of the compass, each of them making a complete circuit in its descent. This mountain is the Navel of Waters where originated all matter, and where sits Yama under the Soma tree, just as in the Norse legend the Norns, or Fates, sit by the great central earth-tree, Yggdrasil.

According to the Greek tradition, Jupiter, in order to settle the true centre of the earth, sent out two eagles, one from east and one from west. They met on the spot on which was erected the Temple of Delphi, and a stone in the centre of that Temple was called the navel of the world. A gold eagle was placed on each side of this stone; the design is preserved in many examples of Greek sculpture, and the stone itself is mentioned in several of the Greek plays.

With reference to this, Mr. Lethaby in his "Architecture, Mysticism, and Myth," observes: "We may see in this myth of the centre-stone the result of the general direction of thought; as each people were certainly The People first born and best beloved of the gods, so their country occupied the centre of the world. It would be related how the oldest and most sacred city, or rather temple, was erected exactly on the navel. A story like this told of a temple would lead to the marking in the centre of its area the true middle point by a circular stone, a stone which would become most sacred and ceremonial in its import."

And Dr. Schliemann thus writes of a central circle he unearthed in the palace at Tiryns: "In the exact centre of the hall, and therefore within the square enclosed by the four pillars, there is found in the floor a circle of about 3·30 m. diameter. There can be little doubt that this circle indicates the position of the hearth in the centre of the megaron. The hearth was in

all antiquity the centre of the house, about which the family assembled, at which food was prepared, and where the guest received the place of honour. Hence it is frequently indicated by poets and philosophers as the navel or centre of the house. In the oldest time it was not only symbolically but actually the centre of the house, and especially of the megaron. It was only in later days, in the palaces of the great Romans, that it was removed from the chief rooms and established in a small by-room."

All which may be true enough, and yet the location of the hearthstone in the centre of the house may have had less reference to the earth-centre idea, than to the fact that in the circular huts of primitive man it was necessary to have a hole at the apex of the roof. Still it is interesting to note that, as in the Imperial palace at Constantinople, so on the floor of St. Peter's at Rome, and elsewhere, is a flat circular slab of porphyry, associated with all ceremonials.

We have seen the centre of the world placed in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa, but who would expect to find it in America many centuries ago? Yet the traditions of Peru have it that Cuzco was founded by the gods, and that its name signifies "navel"; and traditions of Mexico describe Yucatan as "the centre and foundation" of both heaven and earth. But let us go back to the East as the most likely quarter in which to find it, and as the quarter to which the eyes of man have been most consistently turned.

To successive generations of both Jews and Christians, Jerusalem has been the centre of the world, and the Temple the centre of Jerusalem. The Talmud gives directions to those who are in foreign countries to pray with their faces towards the sacred land; to those in Palestine to pray with their faces towards Jerusalem; to those in Jerusalem to pray with their faces towards the Mount; to those in the Temple to pray with their faces towards the Holy of Holies. Now this was not merely because this sacred spot was a ceremonial centre, but because it was regarded as the geographical centre of the earth. According to the Rabbis, the Temple was built on the great central rock of the world. It is written in the Talmud: "The world is like the eyeball of man: the white is the ocean that surrounds the wall, the black is the world itself, and the pupil is Jerusalem, and the image of the pupil is the Temple." And again: "The land of Israel is situated in the centre of the world,

and Jerusalem in the centre of the land of Israel, and the Temple in the centre of Jerusalem, and the Holy of Holies in the centre of the Temple, and the foundation stone on which the world was grounded is situated in front of the ark." And once more: "When the ark was removed a stone was there from the days of the first Prophets. It was called Foundation. It was three digits above the earth."

This claim is direct enough, and at Jerusalem to this day in the Dome of the Rock, supposed to occupy the site of Solomon's Temple, is a bare stone which, as Sir Charles Warren was assured, rests on the top of a palm-tree, from the roots of which issue all the rivers of the world. The Mohammedans have accepted this same stone as the foundation stone of the world, and they call it the Kibleh of Moses. It is said that Mahomet once intended making this the sacred centre of Islam, instead of Mecca, but changed his mind, and predicted that at the Last Day the black stone—the Kaabah—will leave Mecca and become the bride of the Foundation stone at Jerusalem, so that there can be no possible doubt of the centre of sacred influences.

Concerning the stone at Jerusalem, Professor Palmer says: "This Sakhras is the centre of the world, and on the day of resurrection—it is supposed—the Angel Israfil will stand upon it to blow the last trumpet. It is also eighteen miles nearer Heaven than any other place in the world, and beneath it is the source of every drop of sweet water that flows on the face of the earth. It is supposed to be suspended miraculously between heaven and earth. The effect upon the spectators, however, was so startling, that it was found necessary to place a building round it and conceal the marvel." According to Hittite and Semitic traditions mentioned by Professors Sayce and Robertson Smith, there was a chasm in this central spot through which the waters of the Deluge escaped.

Right down to and through the Middle Ages Jerusalem was regarded by all Christians as the centre of the world. The Hereford map of the thirteenth century, says Mr. Lethaby, shows the world as a plane circle surrounded by ocean, round whose borders are the eaters of men, and the one-eyed and the half men, and those whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders. "Within this border we find everything the heart could desire; the sea is very red, the pillars of Hercules are pillars indeed;

there is the Terrestrial Paradise enclosed by a battlemented wall, and unicorns, manticores, salamanders, and other beasts of fascinating habits are clearly shown in the lands where they live. The centre of all is Jerusalem, a circular walled court, within which again is a smaller circle, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre."

Even when the earth was recognised as a sphere, the idea of Jerusalem being the centre was not given up. Dante held to it, and Sir John Mandeville endeavoured thus to explain away the difficulty. "In going from Scotland or from England towards Jerusalem, men go always upwards, for our land is in the low part of the earth towards the west; and the land of Prester John is in the low part of the world towards the east; and they have the day when we have the night, and on the contrary they have the night when we have the day; for the earth and sea are of a round form; and as men go upward towards one point they go downward to another. Also you have heard me say that Jerusalem is in the middle of the world; and that may be proved and shown there by a spear which is fixed in the earth at the hour of midday, when it is equinoctial, which gives no shadow on any side." Ingenious, if not convincing!

The Greek Church still regard Jerusalem as the middle of the world, and Mr. Curzon tells that in their portion of the Holy Sepulchre they have a magnificently decorated interior in the centre of which is a globe of black marble on a pedestal, under which, they say, the head of Adam was found, and which they declare to be the exact centre of the globe. The Mahomedans generally, however, regard the Kaabah at Mecca as—for the present, at any rate—the true centre. This stone is supposed to have been lowered directly from heaven, and all mosques are built to look towards it. Even in the modern schools of Cairo, according to Mr. Loftie, the children are taught that Mecca is the centre of the earth.

The Samaritans, however, look upon Gerizim as the holy mountain and centre of the religious and geographical world. The Babylonians regarded the great Temple of Bel, according to Professor Sayce, as the house of the Foundation Stone of Heaven and Earth. Gaya, again, is the Mecca of the Buddhists, where Buddha sat under the tree when he received enlightenment. This tree is the Bodhi tree described by Buddhist writers as surrounded by an enclosure rather of a parallelogram than of a square

shape, but with four gates opening to the four cardinal points. In the middle of the enclosure is the diamond throne which a voice told Buddha he would find under a Pipal tree, which diamond throne is believed to be of the same age as the earth. "It is the middle of the great Chilicocosm; it goes down to the limits of the golden wheel and upwards it is flush with the ground. It is composed of diamonds; in circuit it is a hundred paces or so. It is the place where the Buddhas attain the sacred path of Buddhahood. When the great earth is shaken this spot alone is unmoved. When the true law decays and dies it will be no longer visible." According to Sir Monier Williams, a stone marked with nine concentric circles is shown at Gaya as the diamond throne, and the Chilicocosm is not the centre of the world alone but of the Universe.

But in China, also a land of Buddhists, we find another centre, and in India there is an iron pillar at Delhi, dating from the fourth century, supposed by the Brahmans to mark the centre from their point of view. And in Southern India the Tamils have the Temple of Mandura, in the innermost sanctuary of which a rock comes through the floor, the roots of which are said to be in the centre of the earth.

The Indian Buddhists, of course, denied that China could be the Middle Kingdom, for the place where Buddha lived must necessarily be the centre. Nevertheless, the centre is now found by Chinese Buddhists in the Temple of Heaven at Peking, where is one circular stone in the centre of circles of marble terraces, on which the Emperor kneels surrounded by circles—including that of the horizon—and believes himself to be in the Centre of the Universe and inferior only to Heaven.

But in the sixth century a certain Chinese traveller, called Sung-Yun, went to India for Buddhist studies, and he made his way by the Pamirs, the water-shed of the great Asiatic rivers, Indus and Oxus. And of this country he wrote:

"After entering the Tsung Ling mountains, step by step, we crept upwards for four days, and reached the highest point of the range. From this point as a centre, looking downwards, it seemed just as though we were poised in mid-air. Men say that this is the middle point of heaven and earth."

This was written more than thirteen hundred years ago, and men to-day still call this part of Asia the Roof of the World.

DUST AND HYGIENE.

It is questionable whether, with all the attention paid in these days to the subject of hygiene, sufficient consideration is bestowed on the important part dust plays with respect to health. Yet dust is ever with us; with every breath we inhale more or less of it, and are exposed to many dangers from its penetration into our bodies.

Dust is to a large extent a product of human activity. In houses and workshops, on the highways, and in the streets, everywhere there is wear and tear of things, and the product is always dust. The wearing and cleansing of our clothing is continually breaking up its fibres into minute particles, and the friction of clothing on the skin carries away the scales of the epidermis, which are constantly being shed and renewed. Every contact of human feet, horses' hoofs, and the wheels of vehicles with paving and road materials wears away particles of iron and stone. The effects of the weather and the alternations of cold and heat disintegrate all exposed surfaces. To these particles which form the dust invariably present in dwellings, and in the streets, there must be added the innumerable minute cells of vegetable origin incessantly floating in the air, and on a complete view the dust produced by the disintegration of meteors by contact with our atmosphere must also be mentioned.

Dust accordingly consists of portions of all substances, organic and inorganic, which decay by natural processes, and are reduced to powder by any means whatever. Few of its constituents can be recognised by the naked eye. The microscope alone can detect the nature of many, and especially those of the greatest importance.

The organic constituents of dust come partly from the animal and partly from the vegetable kingdom. Besides these there are constituents of mixed nature proceeding from the smoke and waste of industrial works of all kinds.

The inorganic constituents of dust are made up of various salts, especially common salt; many metals, specially iron, lime, quartz, clay, magnesia, and many other compounds; while the smoke of various manufacturing processes adds products, often of poisonous nature, to the air. The principal part of the inorganic portions of dust arises from the decay and wear of the materials of which street pavements are made, and from the pulverisation of the surface of unpaved

roads. The harder and smoother the pavement surface the less is worn off it, and as these constituents of dust are specially disadvantageous to health, it is of great importance for a city to have its streets paved with as durable and smooth-surfaced materials as possible. Not easily worn are basaltic stones, granite, syenite, porphyry; but asphalted and macadamised streets, cement pavements, and more especially roads which are bare of solid covering, yield much dust.

Ehrenberg's investigations, published in 1847, are the first work of any importance in connection with the subject of dust. He subjected dust deposited on objects to close examination, but could only deal with its ruder elements, as the finer dust-particles do not readily settle and are blown away again by the lightest breath of air. Schroeter and Dusch, in 1857, filtered air through cotton wool, and observed the filtrate. Tyndall, 1867, improved on this method. Pasteur used gun-cotton as a filter, and dissolved it in ether, a method which has by far the best claim to exactitude. Air has also been drawn through distilled water, and the dissolved and undissolved substances examined, while more recently many other methods of investigation have been employed.

Tissandier found from his observations on the dust contents of the air in Paris that, after rain, a cubic metre of air contained six milligrammes of solid matter, which was increased nearly fourfold after long drought. In country air, with dry weather, he found three to four and a half milligrammes per metre of air, and in damp weather twenty-five. From twenty-five to thirty-four per cent. of this dust was combustible, and from seventy-five to sixty-six per cent. inorganic matter.

Fodor, of Budapest, after long examination of air at a height of five metres above the earth, found in autumn forty-three, in winter twenty-four, in spring thirty-five, and in summer fifty-five milligrammes of dust in each cubic metre of air as a daily average according to season.

Tichborne, in Dublin, found that street dust contained forty-five per cent. of organic matter and fifty-four inorganic. The air at forty metres' height contained nearly thirty parts of organic matters to seventy of inorganic.

Specially noteworthy is Aitken's method of investigating the dust contents of the air. He makes the individual dust-particles visible by saturating the air to be examined

with water-vapour, and causing deposition of the moisture in very fine droplets, each of which contains a dust-particle as its nucleus, so that the number of droplets, counted by aid of a microscope, gives the numerical quantity of dust present in the particular sample of air under examination. Mr. Aitken has examined by his very ingenious apparatus the air of many places at all elevations. At a height of a thousand feet the number of dust-particles varied on different days from three thousand five hundred to twenty-five thousand per cubic centimetre of air. In the neighbourhood of Cannes, with wind from the mountains, the air contained one thousand five hundred and fifty dust grains, but with wind blowing from the city one hundred and fifty thousand. On the peak of the Rigi-Kulm, when enveloped in cloud, two hundred and ten only were found, but next day two thousand. At the top of the Eiffel Tower, with south wind and cloudy, stormy weather, the number was found subject to rapid alterations, sometimes being as low as two hundred and twenty-six, and again as high as one hundred and four thousand. In London the variation was quite as great.

The same investigator has also shown that the transparency of the air depends on the dust present in it. A relatively high amount of dust allows it to appear pretty transparent if it contains but little moisture, but as soon as the latter is present in more abundance, the circumference of the dust-particles increases, and the clearness of the atmosphere suffers. He has also found that the atmospheric dust begins to deposit the moisture of the air before it has been cooled to the dew point. With high atmospheric pressure, the dust-content is greater than with low pressures, as the abundance of dust depends on the strength of the wind. All the mists examined were found to have a great amount of dust present, and the thickness of the mist depends on the quantity of dust in the air. Hence cities have thicker mists than villages; indeed, the greater amount of dust in cities is the cause of the greater frequency of fogs.

Hygienic science now takes special account of the bacteria contained in the air. The certainty that all processes of decay in organic substances arise from the presence in the air of fructifying germs of minute forms of life, has led to the supposition that the air may also contain micro-organisms capable of producing disease, but attempts to attain to certainty on this

point were long unsuccessful, as the magnifying powers of the microscope were quite insufficient until within comparatively recent years. Ehrenberg, whose results were published in 1847, first succeeded in observing living germs with the microscope. Since then great progress has been made by various methods of investigation, of which a few may be briefly referred to.

Pasteur used a suction apparatus by which air was drawn through gun-cotton or asbestos. The germs contained in the air were entangled in the interstices of these filtering materials, which were then dissolved in ether, and the undissolved matters examined with the microscope, or brought into contact with germ-free nutritive substances suited for the development of micro-organisms, which soon showed themselves by the growth of more or less numerous "colonies," according to the number of the germs contained in the air examined. Miquel caused the air under examination to pass over glass plates smeared with glycerine, which was afterwards, with its contained germs, sown in bouillon. Koch exposed solid plates of transparent gelatine to the air, letting the deposited germs develop "in situ"—a method very convenient for observation, and adopted by most bacteriologists of the present day. Hesse drew air through tubes covered with gelatine on which the impurities were deposited. Petri sucked air by an air-pump through a sterilised sand filter which retained the germs, and gelatine being then mixed with the sand, they manifested their presence by development.

These and many other methods in use have for their object to provide for the germs which may be present in the air a suitable nursery and food materials in which they may develop under conditions permitting their life histories to be microscopically studied. The germs in the air grow and multiply; the inert matters have no effect, and are not taken account of.

It is certain that the germs of the lowest forms of plant life can only be carried into the air if they are surrounded by no fluid, and only dry air in motion can loose them and carry them abroad. Hence air in motion contains more of these than air relatively at rest. But it has also to be noted that a relatively very moist warm air preserves the germinating power of the germs, while dry warm air is disadvantageous to it. Accordingly with relatively high air temperature, and at the same time relatively abundant moisture, without preceding rain,

the number present is highest. Soon after and during rain it is lowest. The lower the temperature, the fewer the germs. In summer they are much more plentiful than in winter. It will be understood that the numbers present in the air for any particular place are essentially different according as the wind has passed over inhabited or uninhabited land before reaching it. The time of day has also an influence. More bacteria are present in the air in the morning than in the evening.

Near the earth's surface bacteria are more abundant than at some height above it, and the numbers decrease with elevation, but micro-organisms have been found at very considerable altitudes. City air is richer in germs than country air; sea air is almost entirely free from them; and the free atmosphere differs from the air in closed spaces. Rooms which are well ventilated and in good hygienic condition contain fewer than where the hygienic conditions are bad.

Of the micro-organisms found in the air, some are capable of causing the decay of organic matters, but are not known to be capable of producing diseases in man, while others are demonstrably disease-producing. The former, or non-pathogenous, are most largely represented, but of the pathogenous, or disease-producing, only one species has as yet been with certainty found. Welz found in the air of Freiburg twenty-three different species of micro-cocci, three of yeast-fungi, and twenty-two different species of bacilli. The single disease-producing bacterium which has yet been certainly found in the air with present methods of investigation, is regarded as the bacterium which causes suppuration, and is found present in many diseases and in many different organs. Its scientific appellation is "*Staphylococcus pyogenes aureus*." It consists of roundish cells which grow in clusters. It is extraordinarily resistant, and dryness especially does not hinder its development as with most other bacteria, which is perhaps the cause that it is almost always to be found in the air. According to Ullmann, in winter and in high regions it is present in smaller numbers than in summer and in the lower layers of the atmosphere. In the warm season it is six or eight times as numerous as in winter. In the open air generally it is much less abundant than in closed spaces, and hospital air contains it in greatest abundance.

Though the single one yet found with certainty in the air, we may confidently

assume that most of those bacteria which cause disease are present in dust. They may not yet have been distinguished there because the proper means and methods of cultivation suited for them have not yet been employed.

The injuries which dust causes are various. That which arises in the course of many industries is directly injurious to the workers—as, for instance, millers, stone-cutters, miners, iron-smelters, suffer by its inhalation. Dust in the air may directly or indirectly cause injury to our bodies both externally and internally. Its direct effects are mostly of a mechanical nature, while indirectly it is the medium by which disease-producing matters are introduced into the body where they develop, and so act, in a certain degree, as poisons.

Mechanically injurious are the inorganic constituents which by traffic are worn off from solid objects, such as the sharp-edged, sharp-pointed particles of street pavements, which easily penetrate the mucous membrane and originate disease. The coal-dust issuing unconsumed from the chimneys of manufactories is similarly hurtful. The eye is especially exposed to injury from hard dust-particles floating in the air, which fall on the conjunctiva, become embedded in it, and unless speedily removed induce inflammation. Part of the penetrating dust is dissolved by the fluids of the eye, other blunt-edged grains are washed out and cause little trouble. Hard particles firmly wedged in may easily cause severer injuries, and the irritation set up favours the introduction of matters which cause infectious eye diseases.

The skin also suffers. Perspiration prevents the greater part from getting a foothold, but fungi find occasionally a favourable ground for development and cause skin diseases. The bacillus of suppuration may penetrate even the uninjured skin, giving rise to inflammatory processes, boils, abscesses, and so on, and originate disease even in the deeper tissues. The mucous lining of the breathing and digestive organs may be mechanically injured by the penetration of hard, sharp-edged dust-grains. Such effects are not in themselves of much importance, but they frequently open the door for the entrance of more serious disease-producing matters. The respiratory apparatus suffers especially in this respect, although provided with special means of resistance to the entrance of atmospheric impurities. But if the mucous lining is

not inviolate, and the epithelium weak in places in resistant power, foreign matters may obtain a lodgement and effect penetration, causing serious disturbances. Children are more easily affected than adults. The weather influences have to be reckoned with, for during dry winds diseases of the respiratory organs arise more readily than in rainy weather.

Common colds result from the activity of bacteria, which are also present in inflammation of the lungs. Tuberculosis is the consequence of the settlement and growth of tubercle bacilli, and it may well be assumed that dust is the carrier of these.

It is not too much to say that every man is constantly incorporating micro-organisms by breathing. These do not injure healthy lungs, but injured or unhealthy mucus receives and nourishes them. The perfectly sound man enjoys immunity from diseases which readily seize hold of the man whose system is disordered from any cause.

Besides diseases of the respiratory organs, dust also causes affections of the digestive organs. The micro-organisms floating in the air settle on the teeth, set up trouble there, and thence pass to the stomach and intestines. The great mortality of the first year of infancy is in great part due to the germs of organised beings in the dust of the air which affect the single nourishing fluid of children—milk—and make it injurious to health. Dust settles on all kinds of food; bacteria multiply on and are introduced into the body along with them. The worst results arise from dust falling into wounds, where the bacillus of suppuration finds most suitable nourishment for its rapid multiplication, speedily affecting not only the wound but the surrounding parts, and penetrating into the blood circulation causes the worst forms of general illness. The chief task of the present day treatment of wounds consists in preventing the bacteria of the air from obtaining a settlement on and in them.

An important problem of modern hygiene is the question of protection against this ever-present enemy, dust. As it is present wherever there is life and moving air, and no effective hindrance can be opposed to its origin, there remains nothing but as far as possible to render it innocuous on the spot, and further to remove it out of our immediate neighbourhood.

If dwellings are to gain in salubrity they must be cleansed much more carefully than is usually done, especially with the poorer

classes. They are, it is true, daily or almost daily cleaned and swept, besides being occasionally damp-wiped or sprinkled, but all this is done but superficially at the best. Dust is removed from the more prominent articles by dry "dusting"; floors are swept dry—moisture would injure the furniture. The coarsest elements of the dust are, by this perfunctory housemaid's process, certainly removed from houses, but the finer, and just the most dangerous, are merely whirled up into the air, to settle again in places not daily accessible, accumulate there, and remain until a "big cleaning," to be then either entirely removed, or perhaps in many cases only once more whirled up.

The carpets, curtains, and various hangings of modern houses provide favourite resting-places for dust, and in the generally superficial methods of cleaning employed, only very seldom are those conditions fulfilled which must be observed if due regard is to be paid to the hygiene of dwellings in this respect. These are: daily airing of rooms—how many men would rather sit in a chemically impure and dusty atmosphere than expose themselves, even for a moment, to a harmless draught?—further, damp wiping of all furniture and other articles, and cleansing of floors with the help of water. Quite especial care must be taken in cleansing sick-rooms. Those in attendance on a sick person are seldom aware that by unsuitable methods of cleaning they frequently cause much injury to the patient, and perhaps aid in spreading the disease.

But even should the purification of dwellings be most carefully carried out, there remains the disposal of the refuse. Instead of being burned on the spot and so made harmless, it is put into open vessels and from these transferred to dust-bins without regard to the wind, which carries a great part of the finest dust into the air when the vessels are being shaken out. This manœuvre is repeated when the dust-bins are emptied into open waggons which then wend their way through the public streets, while every gust of wind wafts away a portion of their contents and carries them again into the houses and the persons of the inhabitants. Authorities declare the whole system to be directly injurious, and urge the universal adoption in houses of closed portable vessels, the contents of which should be removed at least twice a week by the public cleansing staff, but only in carts provided with moveable iron covers. Moisture should be liberally

employed, so that during the entire course of removal the refuse may be kept damp, and thereby prevented from being scattered abroad by wind.

These precautions are still more necessary with regard to the cleansing of the streets, by which, in many cases, offences of the gravest kind are committed against the most elementary rules of health. Street refuse amounts to a very great quantity. It has been reckoned to amount, for a town of one hundred thousand inhabitants, to thirty-five or forty tons a day in dry weather, and to one hundred or even one hundred and eighty tons a day in wet weather. On an average, in streets with the greatest traffic five or six waggon-loads of street mud are formed daily on each mile. In many cities much is done, in many little, but nowhere enough to remove this. The transport business is mostly left to the rain and winds, both of which work much mischief. Rain carries a considerable proportion of street impurities into the sewers; a greater part sinks with the rain into the ground and impregnates it with filth, and often thereby contaminates the drinking water. In well-paved cities this is less the case than where the pavement is imperfect, with irregularities in whose hollows rain water collects, and with its richness in organic matters, especially bacteria, slowly soaks into the ground. When the wind takes up the business of removal only a very small part is carried beyond the city bounds, most is carried into the houses, and dwelling-rooms, and the lungs of the people.

To avoid these unpleasantnesses it is requisite that the cleaning should be undertaken more frequently than is generally done. Air in movement only carries abroad bacteria when these and the matters in and on which they are found are relatively dry. To prevent the drying and reduction to dust of such waste matters, attempts have been made in many places to keep the streets moist by the use of hygroscopic materials. The results were generally favourable, but on a large scale such a process is inadmissible on account of the great cost. It might be used with advantage during times of severe epidemics, with the addition of disinfectants.

The most easily available and cheapest means of cleaning streets are always water and the besom—especially the revolving brush of street-sweeping machines. With both together, on a sufficient scale, with abundance of water and plenty of hands,

the best possible would be done. But it must be confessed that even in cities such measures are either not adopted at all, or are employed on an entirely insufficient scale. In small towns it is the business of the people themselves; in large towns the municipal authorities take it in hand. Ignorance and carelessness on the part of the former, want of sufficient funds on the part of the latter, prevent proper efficiency. Watering, when it is done, is insufficient, there are too few sweepers, and the whole is but superficially performed. Even the best intentioned municipal regulations fall short, and even these are not fully carried out. In hot weather, when the necessity is greatest, water is so sparingly sprinkled by the passing water-cart that it has dried up before the sweeper comes on the ground, with the result that the work is almost worse than useless.

The cost of town and city cleansing can hardly mount too high. There is no better expenditure of public funds, nor one more directly beneficial to the people, than the prevention of sickness, for sickness costs much money.

THE STRANGE RESULTS OF A STRANGE WAGER.

I.

As Mr. Dan Driscoll from Skibbereen was strolling along Dame Street, Dublin, one afternoon, he encountered a remarkable-looking individual in a blue coat and buckskin breeches.

"Hillo, Whalley! Is that you?" he cried. "Where are you bound for?"

"Is it me?" was the reply. "Faix, thin, it's nobody else. An' I'm bound for the House. Grattan's goin' to spake agin the Government."

"Nonsense, man. This isn't a Government night at all. There's nobody there but a lot of noodles not worth listening to. Come round with me to the Phaynix for dinner. Tom Macnamara and some other jolly fellows will be there, and we're sure to have some good fun."

"All right, my boy, I'm game for a spree any day," responded the gentleman in blue, and off the pair of "bucks" went to the club which Mr. Driscoll facetiously denominated the "Phaynix."

"Bucks" and "bloods" were so called from the smartness of their apparel, and the way in which they attempted to ape the fine gentleman. Some of them, indeed, belonged to families of distinction, who

generally looked upon their wild freaks with a lenient eye. These young fellows were dashing, reckless, liberal of their means—when they had any—and always seeking fresh outlets for their happy superabundance of animal spirits. In Dublin, during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, their antics furnished the hilarious society of that gay metropolis with perennial food for mirth.

Buck Whalley—like most Irishmen—could trace his descent from a princely family. Unfortunately, his branch of it had fallen upon evil days, and his early education had been much neglected. However, he was possessed of a strong constitution, which the athletic exercises of his country—leaping, running, wrestling, and playing with the cudgel—had developed and hardened. Probably these pastimes were more congenial to him than the pursuit of literature, of which, it is no injustice to say, he knew nothing whatever.

But there was a latent ambition in the young man's breast that ultimately brought him fame. Moreover, by a sudden change of fortune he became possessed of ample means, which he determined to spend in a manner worthy of an Irishman and a Whalley.

He immediately appeared among the "young bloods" of Dublin, and speedily gained admittance to many of the fashionable clubs, whose members were delighted to have a new sensation. Nobody could deny that he was a buck of the first head. His remarkable garments, his primitive manners, the easy assurance of his ignorance, his rustic humour, his innocence of the fashionable world, all conspired to make him attractive to the sportive gentry of the Irish capital. He was "outré," "bizarre," extraordinary; they found him a source of endless amusement, and by unanimous consent he was dubbed "Buck Whalley," having beyond all doubt proved his claim to that proud title.

In those days, as in ours, betting was a mania among certain classes. Football was not so popular as it is now; but men took the odds on horses and dogs and cocks and pugilists, on elections and duels and drinking bouts, and on every event of the day or of the night. The celebrated Beau Nash won fifty pounds by doing penance in a blanket at the door of York Minster while the people were coming out of church. He gained a still larger sum by riding naked on a cow through a country village. Oliver Goldsmith speaks of high-bred

women staking fortune, beauty, health, and reputation at the card table. He tells a story of one old lady who was so very ill that she was given over by the physician. Conscious of her condition, she sent for the curate, not to administer ghostly consolation, but to play at cards with her to pass the time! Having won all her adversary's money, she proposed playing for her funeral charges; but alas! the poor lady expired just as she had made her game.

The party at the "Phaynix" naturally grew merry over their dinner and their wine. Politics and sport were vivaciously discussed, and a great deal of ingenuity was wasted in discovering new subjects for a wager.

"I'll bet two to one that George Robert Fitzgerald will fight another duel before the week is out," said Dan Driscoll.

"I'll bet twenty to one that George Robert will never die a natural death," exclaimed Dick Fallows.

"I'll lay anybody a ten-pound note that Jimmy Moffatt's game cock will make mincemeat of Denis O'Brien's bird next Saturday," remarked Ned Lysaght.

"Pooh!" ejaculated Tom Macnamara, a young squireen from County Galway; "can none of you do better than that? Listen to me, now, here's something more out of the common. Whalley, I'll bet you a hundred guineas you don't go to Jerusalem!"

"Done!" cried our hero, who made a point of never refusing a bet.

The news of the wager was soon all over the town. It created a greater sensation than one of Grattan's speeches or Curran's jokes. Would Whalley attempt the journey? That was the question on all lips. Some who were getting tired of him hoped he would; no more appropriate way of having him extinguished could have been devised. Others thought that when the rash buck realised the difficulties of the task he had undertaken, he would hand over the hundred guineas and quietly subside under the storm of ridicule which the wits were already preparing.

II.

MR. WHALLEY'S acquaintance with geography was strictly limited. He had never travelled beyond the confines of his own favoured island, and

Knowledge before his eyes her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll.

True, he had heard of Jerusalem on some of the rare occasions when he attended church. It was somewhere in the Holy

Land; the inhabitants were Jews, and Jews he had found both extremely useful and really friendly under certain circumstances. So when somebody remonstrated with him on his proposed mad escapade, he answered sententiously:

"A man who has plinty of money can go annywhere, and do annything."

It was homely philosophy; but, as events have often proved, it was founded on a substratum of fact.

Whalley was completely ignorant of foreign travel and foreign languages. In his case ignorance was certainly bliss. With a light heart, a stout stick, and a long purse, he set out on his pilgrimage to Palestine. After paying a short visit to London, he arrived safely in Paris, where his eccentricity and lavish expenditure soon brought him notoriety if not fame. The horrors of the great Revolution that was about to shake the thrones of Europe had not yet burst upon the gay city; many natives of the Green Isle were to be found among its brilliant society, and they gave their comical countryman a genuine Irish welcome. Dan Driscoll happened to be there at the time; and Dan introduced the traveller to some of the Parisian "salons," in which Mr. Whalley was the observed of all observers, if not exactly the glass of fashion. But the attractions and festivities of that delightful capital could not detain him; he soon grew anxious to start again on his pilgrimage.

"Look here, Whalley," said Dan Driscoll, "you're taking this thing too seriously. Why don't you stay awhile, and enjoy yourself among these charming French, instead of running off on a wildgoose chase from which you will probably never return?"

"I like the Mossoos very well," returned Whalley, "but I'm determined to win my bet."

"Oh, never mind the bet—there was no time fixed—you can put it off till Doomsday."

"It's very kind of you, Driscoll," said the other firmly, "but I'm goin'. I've made up my mind."

And go he did. From Paris he proceeded by slow stages to Marseilles. Here he took passage on board a ship bound for the Levant. Our space is too limited to recount the perils and remarkable adventures that befell him upon the voyage. Suffice it to say that, after encountering many storms and delays, Greek cut-throats and Algerine pirates, he eventually crossed the reefs at Jaffa, and landed on the shores of Syria.

III.

In Jaffa, Whalley fell in with an old Benedictine monk, who, thinking the traveller was performing a religious vow, kindly took charge of his effects, and gave him some valuable advice in broken English. The good brother endeavoured to make the pilgrim understand that his dress was unsuitable for the East, and that walking was a very difficult mode of progression; but Whalley declared that "what was good enough for Dublin was good enough for anny place," and stoutly maintained his intention of "goin' to Jerusalem on his own two feet;" and with this valiant resolution he started out of Jaffa.

In those days Cook's tours were yet in the dim and distant courses of the future. Western travellers in Asia Minor were few and far between, and Mr. Whalley's appearance was such as would astonish any respectable Mussulman even at the present day. He was dressed up as became the most exalted of Dublin bucks. A small hat jauntily cocked on one side of his head; a long, blue, swallow-tailed coat, adorned with brass buttons of prodigious size; a brilliant waistcoat that displayed half the colours of the rainbow; buckskin breeches and top-boots; and a stout shillelagh which he flourished over his head with great vigour; all combined to make him appear one of the most extraordinary figures that had ever amazed a true believer; while his queer antics, and his strange language, which no dragoman could interpret, added the charm of mystery to this original pilgrim.

"It's mighty hot thravellin' in this counthry," said the pilgrim to himself, at the same time mopping his head with a big red handkerchief—"more betoken, there's not even a dacent pub where a man can slake his thirst. I'm afeard I've lost the road—if there is anny road at all in this outlandish place. Howaniver, I'll ax wan of thim brown, skinny fellows in that dirty village over there."

As he entered the "dirty village," he met a Bedouin family coming out. Beside his donkey walked the father, with a gun slung across his body, and a long reed spear in his hand. A couple of women were seated in a little tent on the donkey's back, one on each side to balance; while two active boys trotted at the father's side.

Mr. Whalley addressed the old gentleman politely. "The top of the mornin' to ye. Can you tell me the way to Jerusalem?"

Mustapha gazed at him in wonder, shook his head, and muttered something in Arabic. To which the pilgrim responded with another query, accompanied by many odd gesticulations; whereat the two boys burst into uncontrollable laughter, being joined therein by several others who had just come up.

Their irreverent levity, added to Mustapha's stolidity and the heat of the day, disturbed Whalley's usual good humour, which was now completely overcome by the conduct of the donkey. That intelligent animal had been investigating the stranger with great interest, and at this stage of the interview coolly proceeded to munch the skirts of the valuable blue coat! This ungentlemanly conduct was promptly resented by the irate Hibernian, who bestowed with his cudgel a sounding thwack on Neddy's ribs.

Now an Eastern donkey is a more aristocratic beast than his down-trodden British brother. He mixes on equal terms with his owner's family, and is regarded as a friend and kinsman by all its members. Naturally, therefore, Mustapha was wroth at the indignity offered to his four-footed companion, and by way of protest suddenly made a wicked thrust at the aggressor with his long spear.

Whalley was not caught napping. With a stroke from his faithful blackthorn he sent the spear flying, and quickly delivered a true Donnybrook whack on the spearman's pate, observing genially:

"Och, shillelagh! ye niver missed fire!"

Immediately there arose a great hubbub. The crowd closed in upon the Irishman, he was borne to earth, speedily bound in spite of his violent struggles, and carried before the Cadi, foaming with rage at his captors.

IV.

ALI BEN YUSEF, the Cadi, was a venerable personage, with a large turban, a long white beard, and a pair of piercing eyes that were singularly bright for a man of his years. He listened patiently to the accuser's story, and then, turning to the accused, spoke a few words, of course in Arabic.

"Bedad," said the prisoner, "you don't luk at all bad for an ould haythen. But I don't understan' a word ye say."

Ali Ben Yusef again addressed him.

"I tell ye," cried Whalley impatiently, "I don't know what ye say at all at all. I only wish I could insinse ye into the way thim vagabones over there behaved, the thaves of the worl'."

What was Mr. Whalley's astonishment to hear the Cadi reply gravely in a rich, mellifluous Tipperary brogue:

"Arrah, bad scan to ye, ye big bosthoon! What do ye mane by comin' here wid yer onmannerly monkey thricks to annoy dacent, quiet people, ye thunderin' spalpeen?"

"Eh? What? How——?" ejaculated the astounded pilgrim. "Holy Saint Denis! What's this at all?"

"Why don't ye behave yersilf, ye great omadhaun?" continued Ali in the same grave tones. "What are ye doin' here, batin' honest men's donkeys with yer murderin' club?"

"Sure, I was on my way peaceably to Jerusalem, when that ill-bred baste of an aas begun to ate me up, an' I only protisted agin him wid my stick."

"Well," said Ali, "if I get you off will ye promise to conduct yersilf properly? I like yer brogue—it's swate to my ears afther such a long fast—an' I want to have a colloque wid ye."

"I'll promise annything," returned the prisoner, "if ye'll only give me a dhrink of could wather—especially if there's a taste of Cork whisky at the bottom of it."

Thus assured, the Cadi again turned to the Arabs, who were listening in their stoical way to this curious colloquy, of which they understood nothing save the varying expression on the prisoner's face. However, the altered demeanour of the combative Hibernian convinced them that their magistrate was a man of profound wisdom.

"O true believers!" said he, "Allah is great, and Mohammed is His prophet! This man is a gentile dervish from beyond the great sea, who has taken upon himself a vow to visit Jerusalem. Allah has seen fit to afflict him—to deprive him of reason—he is mad, my brethren, stark mad, and so deserves our pity. Let us treat him with the consideration due to his state of sorrow. I will entertain him to-night; and do you, brethren, help him on his painful way to-morrow."

Of course Whalley could not understand the drift of these remarks; but he saw the look of anger gradually melt into an expression of pity and even respect, as the people unbound him, handed him his shillelagh, and quietly dispersed; and he also was deeply impressed with the Cadi's wisdom:

That functionary's hospitality was equal to his wisdom. He took the stranger to his residence, furnished him with food and

water, and when they were seated on the divan, smoking and drinking coffee, he observed:

"What's yer name?"

"Whalley—they call me Buck Whalley in Dublin."

"Ha, Dublin! Do you know Skinner's Alley there?"

"I do, well."

"Is there a little fish shop in it kep' by wan Mrs. Muldoon?"

"Arrah, is it ould Biddy Muldoon ye mane?"

"Ould?" said the Cadi quickly. Then after a pause, he added: "Ay, well, of coorse she must be gettin' ould now, the crathur. I was forgettin' that 'tis thirty years since I saw her."

"How on earth do ye know Biddy Muldoon?" said the pilgrim.

"How do I know her, is it? Why, man alive, I'm her son, Pat Muldoon, that run away to say in the 'Betsy Jane' thirty years ago!"

"Whew!" ejaculated Whalley, surveying the other dubiously. "This bangs Banagher! Sure she tould me herself Patsy was only a wee boy of twelve at the time, an' you're an ould man of seventy at laste!"

The Cadi chuckled.

"You're a man of the world, Whalley," he said, "an' you know you can't always believe yer eyes. A chemist that I sarved in Italy larned me the saycret of turning my hair an' beard as white as snow, or as black as a coal."

"Well, it bates all," rejoined the guest. "But now that I think of it, Biddy believes that you're still alive. She gets a bit of money from abroad now an' agin, an' she declares it comes from her own wee bouchal, Patsy."

"Glory be to Heaven for that same!" murmured the Cadi, piously crossing himself. Then with a smile at his own lapse, he continued: "Allah is great! Come, tell me how the poor crathur is gettin' on. It's mate an' dhrink to me to meet a boy from the old sod wanst more."

With true Eastern hospitality the Cadi entertained his guest for three days, and then sent him on his way refreshed and strengthened.

On bidding him farewell, Whalley asked:

"Is there anny service I can do you in return for your kindness, Muldoon?"

"Two," answered the Cadi. "First, never mention to annybody but my mother that you have seen me; and second, don't

let the poor ould crathur want for a shillin' or two."

"Niver fear that," responded Whalley, wringing his hand.

And so they parted.

The invisible telegraph that carries news in the desert had anticipated the pilgrim's journey. Lunatics have a sacred character in the eyes of most of the Eastern peoples, even to this day; so the traveller was received everywhere along his route with kindness and respect. He passed through Ramleh, on through the gorge Ali, and the village of Abu Gosh, and at length arrived safely in the Holy City.

The "street of David" was crowded with a seething mass of humanity. There were Christian Syrians in that queer garment, half pantaloons, half petticoat; Jews with battered black hats, Jews with shaven heads, and Jews with ringlets; merchants in silk and velvet, and shopkeepers ragged, patched, and motley; wild Bedouins from the desert, in their striped burnouses, Turkish soldiers in their dirty blue; and an occasional Russian pilgrim in long caftan, fur cap, and high boots. But perhaps the most remarkable figure of all was that of the Dublin buck in his blue coat and flowered vest,

Whose form had not yet lost
All its original brightness.

However, his formidable cudgel, which he flourished about his head with playful vigour, together with the reputation that had preceded him, kept the curious at a respectful distance.

In Jerusalem he found an interpreter who understood English, and by his aid procured a certificate from the authorities that he had actually visited the city. With this in his pocket he remained a few days to see the sights, and then disappeared as suddenly as he had arrived.

V.

FOUR years have passed. Tom Macnamara is at the "Phaynix" with some of his cronies. Their money is exhausted, and they are growing unusually sentimental.

"Boys," says Tom, "what changes a short time brings about. Why, I believe I'm the only one left of the company that used to meet here three or four years ago."

"Ah, poor Dan Driscoll!" says another. "I heard he was guillotined by that monster, Robespierre."

"So he was," declares a third, "and by the same token his friend, Dick Fallows, broke his neck hunting on the Curragh."

"Then there was Buck Whalley," says Tom. "He wasn't a bad sort, but he had no gumption. You know he started for Jerusalem. Well, I believe he was captured by a Barbary corsair and taken to Algiers, where the Dey petted him until he found the festive Whalley trying to bolt with his favourite wife. Then the poor fellow was sold to an Arab slave dealer, and carried off in chains to Timbuctoo; and I daresay he is flogged to death by this time. I'm sorry; though it saves me a hundred guineas—if I only had them!"

"Allow me to inform you," says a person at the door who has just heard this speech, "allow me to inform you, Thomas Macnamara, Esquire, of the County Galway, that Buck Whalley is not flogged to death, an' that you haven't saved yer hundred guineas, for I'm here to claim the money on the blissid spot!"

And sure enough there he was, blue coat, brass buttons, flowered waistcoat, top-boots, blackthorn, and all! Tom was impetuous; there was no cash. But what of that? The good-natured buck had won fame and glory, and the base consideration of filthy lucre was altogether beneath his notice in the exuberance of his triumph.

The subsequent career of the adventurous pilgrim is soon told. His cognomen was promptly and unanimously changed; instead of Buck Whalley he was styled Jerusalem Whalley—a title he accepted with great pride. He resorted to London; paid another visit to Paris during the Peace of Amiens; spent his money freely; and dissipated his fortune in gaming, drinking, and riotous living. Returning to his native country, he retired to poverty and obscurity, and, deserted by his boon companions, was finally gathered to his fathers; but the story of his great wager survived in clubs, and coffee-houses, and drawing-rooms, for many years after its hero had been laid to rest in a nameless grave.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "*The Thirteenth Brydais*," "*Catherine Maidment's Burden*," "*Benefit of Clergy*," "*The Vicar's Aunt*," etc. etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was eleven o'clock on a hot August morning. So hot was the air that it seemed to dance and vibrate in visible heat-waves over the streets and roofs of London. There is something about the heat of an August day distinctly different from that of

any other hot day in any other earlier month. June days may be scorching; the July sun may pour mercilessly down on houses and people; but the heat of August contains something far more oppressive still. There is a dryness and parchedness in the air in August which is not present earlier. It is as if the air had done all that was possible during the summer to fulfil its mission of sheltering the earth from the fiercest heat of the sun; and becoming itself at length permeated through and through with the rays it can no longer screen, is in its own turn a source of heat.

In London this characteristic of the August air is added to by the refraction from burning house-fronts, dazzling pavements, and shimmering roofs. And the air, intensely oppressive in the country and the cornfields, is stifling in the streets.

There was on this particular August morning no hotter spot in the whole expanse of London, than a small red-brick villa in a dreary half-built street belonging to an outlying suburb. The suburb itself was not new; it had been long known as a commonplace, cheap, respectable part of London; but the street in question, and some half-dozen neighbouring ones, had lately undergone a reformation—a pulling down and a building up at the hands of a person or persons who had re-christened this special section of the old suburb by a more distinguished name. They had abjured its old friend's shelter, and borrowed a name from a more aristocratic locality to which it certainly, even with one of the points of the compass prefixed to it, had no real claim.

The red villa was characteristic of the spirit that had animated these proceedings. It had an imposing iron railing, heavy enough to guard extensive grounds, to enclose its insignificant strip of front garden; and the massive gate in this railing opened on to a flight of steps ending in a portico that seemed to be all white floriated stucco capitals. Inside the heavy door the scheme was just the same. An entrance-hall, much too large for the size of the house, afforded a place whence to survey two doors opening into the smallest of dining and drawing-rooms, one behind the other. In this special red-brick villa the drawing-room was the back one of the two rooms. It was furnished in harmony with the house. There was a fire-screen of some wonderful design in the grate, a chromo-lithograph or so on the walls, and four chairs and a sofa covered in cretonne so worn and faded that

the dim old carpet on which it stood looked quite respectable by comparison. The window faced a square of back garden containing a broken trellis, some struggling geraniums, and one sapling plane. Its yellow blind was drawn half down to keep out the sun, which was glaring mercilessly down on the back garden; and beside the window, playing aimlessly with the blind-tassel, and staring out at the same time into the untidy, scorching square of garden, stood Richenda Leicester, alone.

It was a fortnight since she had left Mrs. Fitzgerald's house, and she had spent the fortnight in this red-brick villa. It was the home of Bessie Langton, the girl whom Richenda had expected to meet at the New Gallery. Miss Langton, on hearing that Richenda was going away from Bryanston Street, had at once, with ready kindness, asked her to come and stay with her "for a few days, to think things over." Richenda had accepted the invitation very gratefully, and for all of the past fortnight she had been engaged in "thinking things over."

To judge from the expression of her face, the occupation had not been very satisfactory in any way. She was looking harassed, and not at all happy. Her cheeks were very pale, and her pretty mouth was compressed, while her beautiful eyes were troubled and anxious. The anxiety was not at all unnatural; for not even all the thinking she had bestowed could make the "things" she was turning over easy to arrange.

She had left Mrs. Fitzgerald with a sort of slur upon her name. Perhaps that is rather a strong word to use; but the facts were these: Mrs. Fitzgerald, after furiously declaring at first that she should tell every one who asked her that Richenda had left her in disgrace, softened down somewhat as the days went on, and said, more moderately, that she would always be willing to give her testimonials as an excellent children's nurse, but that her private conduct she must say, if asked, had been far from satisfactory. Of course, though it sounded milder, this was tantamount to giving her no testimonials at all, Richenda knew; and she went her way on the day she left with a heavy heart enough, and a sore and bitter one too. She went first to report herself at the Institution which had trained her, and to ask for help in getting more work. She told her own tale, simply and concisely; and she was, as she had hoped to be, believed as to its main outline. But she received a long and careful

warning to be more discreet and generally more tactful in her life, and the warning was ended by the statement that this first failure would be a great and serious drawback to her for the immediate future. And though she got the promise of every possible help, it was tinged with the same shadow of doubtfulness as to its accomplishment, and poor Richenda had left the Institution for Bessie Langton's home in a very sombre frame of mind.

Her stay in the red-brick villa had brought nothing to lighten her care, as yet. She had wasted no time; she had tried at once, in every one of the quarters that were open to her, to hear of fresh work, but nothing had presented itself. It was a "bad time of year," she was assured, with a unanimous conviction that was not needed to impress the fact on her sinking spirits; she had been discovered to be "too young" on the only occasion on which she had had the least hope of success; and her letters to the very few friends who might have helped her had received scarcely any answers.

And on this hot morning poor Richenda was feeling downcast indeed. The crowning point of her anxious distress lay in the feeling that she could not any longer stay where she was. The Langtons were as kind as any people could have been, but they were almost as poor as Richenda herself, and she knew well that their scanty resources were not calculated to bear the burden of an extra member in the household. She had, literally, nowhere to go, and nothing to do.

She had turned over the whole position in her mind almost as many times, during the half-hour that she had been standing at the drawing-room window, as she had turned over the tassel in her fingers. She dropped it wearily at last, with a heavy sigh, and, stretching up both hands on the ledge of the window, let her face fall on to the backs of her hands.

Suddenly the silence in that dull, hot drawing-room was broken by almost the only sound that ever did break the monotony of the daily life in the red-brick villa—the postman's knock. Richenda heard it, and raised her face slowly from her hands. There were two great tears in the beautiful eyes, but Richenda brushed them hastily away, and, turning, went slowly out of the drawing-room to see if there were any letters for her. Of letters about any work she almost despaired, with the complete despair which belongs to youth.

fulness of heart. Nevertheless, she might as well see what had come, she told herself now, as she had told herself every time she had heard the same sound through all the past days. If there were no other letters, she said, as she entered the ill-proportioned hall, there might be letters for her from her brothers.

It was very foolish of her, and she knew it well, but she had not been able to bring herself to tell them yet that she had gone away from Mrs. Fitzgerald's house. She had hoped, at first, that she might get something else to do quickly enough to make it unnecessary to tell them what would make Jack, at all events, as unhappy for her as she was for herself. And day by day, as her hope failed, the courage necessary to give the news to the hearts she loved best had failed too. Twice their letters had been sent on from Mrs. Fitzgerald's house to her, and she expected to have from the younger boys a letter thus sent on this morning.

Just as she reached the front door, the dining-room door opened, and Mr. Langton, the master of the poor little red brick villa and its belongings, came out into the hall. He was a little bent, shrunken man of sixty or so. He had "retired," because of ill-health, on a tiny pension two years before, from a clerkship of some sort; and, in spite of his inability to perform it, he found his days long and monotonous without their routine. The postman's knock was as much an event of importance to him as it was to the anxious Richenda.

He was very fond, in a tremulous, fatherly fashion, of his daughter's pretty guest and friend. Richenda had been pleasant and gentle to the poor, uninteresting old man, and he repaid it with the keenest appreciation.

"Looking for your letters, my dear?" he said now cheerfully, as Richenda stooped to pick up a little scattered heap lying on the ground. "I hope they'll bring you luck, I'm sure. Any for me?" he added, with the doubtful air of a person who does not in the least really expect any.

Richenda glanced through those she had taken up and handed him two. His pleasure seemed in no way affected by the fact that they were only circulars, and he tottered happily back with them into the dining-room. Meanwhile, Richenda walked slowly back towards the drawing-room with hers.

They were three. One address was in a straggling handwriting, which seemed to

be the joint efforts of the twins; one was in a girlish hand; and the third, which she had scarcely noticed as she crumpled the last two up in her hand, was a little long-shaped business envelope which held a neat clerical address.

She had opened the boys' letter to her at once, and as she crossed the hall her eyes had eagerly scanned the loving, straggling sentences on its first page. She absently opened the drawing-room door with one hand, and shut it again behind her while she turned the letter eagerly over in her other hand. She betook herself to her old place by the window mechanically, and standing there she went through the boyish letter to its end, dwelling with eager content on the sentences which implied that the twins were happy, in spite of one or two references to "when we live with you, Richie," which made her bite her lips fiercely to keep the tears of vexation and distress out of her eyes.

She folded it again at length and laid it on the window-sill beside her, with a sudden remembrance of her other letters. They were still crushed in her hand, and she straightened and unfolded them. They were not exciting to look at in any way, and Richenda's tired mind had come to that stage in which every fresh disappointment is a fresh blow. And she shrank now from opening strange letters, from a heavy foreboding of what their contents would assuredly be. However, she took the one in the girlish handwriting and opened it with an effort. It was from a girl she had known in her old home. She was coming to London for a day or two, and she asked if Richenda could meet her and help her with some shopping. "If you are not too busy, now you're at work," the writer said. "I don't really expect for one moment you will have time to come out with me." Richenda read to the end of the little note, and then laid it down on the window-sill beside the other with a sarcastic little laugh.

"Heaps of time, Lily!" she said, mockingly and bitterly. "Take your choice as to days."

She swung her small foot angrily, and the small foot touched something on the floor. Richenda glanced down. It was the third letter, which must have dropped from her hands in opening the other. She stooped languidly, and picked it up; and still more languidly she opened it without one glance either at the handwriting or the

post-mark. She began to read it casually. As her eyes made their way down the page a pink flush stole into her cheeks. It deepened and deepened fast; then it all faded, leaving her very white. She sat down heavily in the nearest chair, and caught with one hand at the back of it. Then she began to read the letter through again. The pink came back in the form of a vivid crimson, which overspread the pretty face from brow to throat; and Richenda, still grasping the letter, started up, throwing down her chair by the suddenness of the movement. She rushed across the drawing-room, flung open the door, and dashed into the hall and threw open the dining-room door.

"Mr. Langton! Mr. Langton!" she cried. "Do listen! The rest are out, and I must tell some one! Do you think it can be true, really? Oh, do listen!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"THIS is the house, sir."

The driver of a hansom cab which had pulled up at the gate in the railings of the red-brick villa, spoke the words through the trap to his fare. The cab had stopped at least a moment before, and as the occupant had no belongings, small or large, the driver had expected him to jump out at once. But he had looked about him doubtfully, first at the street in which he found himself, then at the red-brick villa itself. It was this hesitation that had led to the driver's reassuring words.

"You are sure?"

"In course, sir. At least, according to what you says to me. Number five you says, and number five it is. Thank you, sir, I'm sure."

The last words bore reference to the money which the man inside the cab, who had risen while the driver was speaking, now placed in his hand. With a quick movement he got down now from the step, and went in at the gate and up to the front door.

The driver looked after him contemptively.

"Nice-spoken, free-handed swell!" he said to himself as he turned the horse round. "Now what's the like of him doing hereabouts, I wonder?"

The front door of the red-brick villa was opened, as the driver drove himself and his reflections away; opened by the one servant of the establishment. This was a girl of about sixteen, whom Mrs. Langton spoke of in terms of heartfelt satisfaction as a "treasure." It is therefore to be pre-

sumed that it was her intrinsic worth which led to her outward shortcomings, for these were various. She had unkempt and frizzled hair, surmounted by a cap with long and very dirty white streamers; she had a grimy cotton frock, and both her bare arms and her face bore trace of recent contact with the kitchen range.

The man on the doorstep had never seen, much less stood before a door opened by, such a servant. For a moment he gazed in wonder at her. Then the "treasure" said sharply:

"Well, sir?"

And he seemed to collect himself.

"Is Miss Leicester in?" he said.

The "treasure" took a moment for consideration, then she replied brusquely: "Yes, walk this way," and proceeded to shut the door and marshal him across the hall. He followed her very meekly to the drawing-room door; he paused equally meekly while she inserted her person into the room, and he obeyed her implicitly when she came out and said:

"There's no one there; you can walk in."

"What name?" she added, with the door in her hold.

"Sir Roderick Graeme," he said.

Titled visitors were not of everyday occurrence at the red-brick villa; and the "treasure" seemed to realise this fact, for she took a long and comprehensive survey of Sir Roderick with very widely opened eyes before she shut the door with a bang and disappeared.

Left to himself, Sir Roderick drew a chair out from its place, and sat down. He established himself close to the window, in the very place where Richenda had stood that morning reading her letters. Though it was afternoon now, the little back drawing-room was still hot and stuffy, and he thought he would get as much air as possible. He looked deliberately and curiously, from this position, all round the small room. His eyes were not always especially observant, but now they took in every detail of the worn, ugly furniture, the frightful cretonne and the faded carpet. Even the pictures and the fire-screen received a share of his attention.

"Great Scott!" he said, below his breath, as he finished his survey. "My poor little girl! I can manage something better than this, that is certain!"

He fixed his eyes, as he said it, on that pattern in the faded carpet which was immediately below them, and fell to

tracing its worn outlines with his stick with apparent concentration.

Sir Roderick's face wore an expression that was strange and unusual. It was very diffident, and very humble. And though as the background of this there was an unmistakable decision, yet there was in his outward manner a hesitation and a nervousness which were altogether foreign to his simple and un-self-conscious personality.

He had traced the pattern carefully at least four times, when the drawing-room door opened suddenly. Sir Roderick looked up, and got up hastily. A slight flush appeared on his face, as he saw Richenda Leicester's.

On Richenda's face there was a glowing crimson colour, and Sir Roderick, well as he had thought he knew it, told himself that he had never seen it so pretty before. Her beautiful eyes were sparkling with some kind of excitement, and her mouth was set in the prettiest of its many sweet curves.

"How do you do?" she said, in answer to Sir Roderick's somewhat diffident greeting. "I am very glad to see you."

If Sir Roderick's manner had an unusual diffidence, Richenda Leicester's, on the contrary, had an unusual certainty. It was a certainty Sir Roderick, at any rate, had never seen in her; and the consciousness of it, and of its strangeness, added to his own confused nervousness.

"I am very glad to see you," he said awkwardly.

"Won't you sit down?" Richenda said. They were standing, face to face, by the window.

"Thank you," he said simply, and sat down again in the chair from which he had risen. Richenda sat down opposite to him in the pretence at an easy-chair that was all the room afforded.

"It was very kind of you to come so far to see me," she said, looking up at him with her sparkling eyes. As she sat, she tapped the tip of her small foot on the ground with an incessant little movement, as if it were impossible to her to keep quite still. She twisted her fingers restlessly in and out of each other, the beautiful crimson colour on her cheeks kept deepening and paling, and her eyes seemed actually to dance with excitement.

Sir Roderick was very much taken aback. He was a modest young man in his heart, and he never imagined that all this excitement arose from his own arrival. Besides, even a vain man could not have thought so; it was not the kind of excitement that

would be called forth by any attachment to him on her part. It was far too obvious, far too unrestrained and simple. But it seemed to possess Richenda wholly, and Sir Roderick could not understand it at all. All he did perceive was that the girl before him was a Richenda Leicester who was quite different to the girl who had been in his thoughts and his heart of late; this was a girl he did not know. This girl seemed to have lost all remembrance of the relations that had existed between them. She knew him and welcomed him as an acquaintance, but the ground on which they met was all changed; no thoughts of when, or where, or how they had ever met before seemed to find a place in her mind. They seemed to be all swept out of it by something which he did not and could not understand. Nevertheless, his purpose remained the same; indeed, Richenda's wonderfully increased beauty had only strengthened it in his mind.

"No," he said, in answer to her words. "No, it isn't kind, except to myself. Miss Leicester, I may as well——"

He was interrupted. Richenda evidently had not heard a word of his last speech, and she broke unceremoniously into it without any definite consciousness that he was speaking at all.

"I'm so glad you've come," she went on, just as if he had not spoken in answer to her, "because I do so want to tell some one else! I've told every one I can think of, but there are very few people in this house."

Sir Roderick stared at her in amaze. Was his brain unsteady, he wondered, or was hers? For what could she mean?

"I don't quite understand," he said humbly.

"No! How should you!"

She laughed a light, ringing laugh.

"That's why I'm so glad you've come," she cried. "It is my letter—my letter that came this morning I want to tell you about. I have had a lot of money left to me! I am rich! Quite rich!"

She stopped, her dancing eyes sparkling more than ever.

Sir Roderick stared at her hard for a moment, and then his face grew slowly rather pale.

"You are rich?" he said hesitatingly and doubtfully. "You have some money, did you say?"

"A lot!" she said exultingly. "It truly is a lot! It is—Mr. Langton says so—enough for me to have a nice large house of

my own, and have the boys to live with me. Oh, it is so very nice!"

"It has been left to you?" said Sir Roderick. His voice was rather strange, even to himself, and he seemed to find it oddly difficult to grasp what Richenda was saying.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, it has. A cousin of ours, quite an old man, whom we never knew, has died very suddenly. I never even knew he was dead. He was kind to us, he has been paying for the boys to go to school; but I never, never dreamed of his leaving us money! And now he has left it to me. To me! And I can make it all so nice for the boys. I can't tell you how nice it all is. Don't you think it's lovely?"

Sir Roderick bit his lip under the shelter of his moustache.

"Indeed, I do," he said slowly. "I congratulate you, I do indeed. I am very glad to hear of it."

His words came rather stiffly in the midst of Richenda's unrestrained excitement. But she did not seem to heed, or even to know this.

"Oh, I don't know what to do, I am so glad!" she exclaimed. "I can do such beautiful things, it's all like a dream. It's thousands of pounds! Fancy me with thousands of pounds!"

"Have you a—any adviser on whom you can rely?"

"His lawyer—I mean our cousin's—is going to help me. He is to go on managing it all; he says the will said so. And he's coming here to see me to-morrow. Oh, I can't think of anything else at all!"

There was a little pause. Sir Roderick's eyes traced out once more the faded pattern they had been following when Richenda came into the room. Then he rose from his chair.

"I must be going now," he said. His voice was still strange and a little strained. "I am very glad I happened to be here to hear of your good fortune. I congratulate you with all my heart."

He was preparing to shake hands, but Richenda had not offered him hers as yet.

"Won't you have some tea?" she said. "Must you really go? Mrs. Langton said she would get some."

"I must really go," he said, "thank you very much."

She rose, and with her still sparkling eyes full upon him, she let him take her hand.

"I'm so glad you came," she said. "It was nice to have you to tell it to. Isn't it delightful?"

"Delightful," he echoed gravely.

And then he let her hand fall, and went out of the drawing-room. Richenda rang the bell energetically, but the "treasure" did not appear, and Sir Roderick let himself out of the house. He shut the iron gate in the heavy railing with the minutest care, and then he walked slowly down the dreary suburban street in the heat of the August afternoon. He had a dim idea that he was walking to a cab-stand, but he had passed two without seeing them before he mechanically hailed a passing hansom, got in, and was driven back to more familiar parts of London.

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